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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: POLITICS AND IMPUNITY IN THE SCHOOLYARD

Ref: 08 YEREVAN 794

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) The oppositional newspaper Haykakan Zhamanak reported that on February 24 the teenage son of Gagik "Chorni (Black) Gago" Beglarian -- the district chairman of Yerevan's Central ("Kentron") district -- called in his father's bodyguards to deal with a schoolmate, with whom he had had a brawl. According to the report, the bodyguards beat the teenage boy with batons on the school's premises -- in front of numerous eyewitnesses -- then kidnapped and returned him several hours later with even worse injuries, which reportedly led to him being hospitalized. Both Beglarian's son and the victim attend a prestigious high school in downtown Yerevan (School #114), where Yerevan's political and business elite tend to send their children. (NOTE: While the final candidates for Yerevan's mayoral elections scheduled to take place on May 31 are still unclear, Beglarian is known to be the almost-certain ruling party candidate to become the first elected Yerevan mayor. He recently won re-election as the Kentron prefect in a hotly contested September 2008 vote that was marred by serious irregularities, including ballot-stuffing, vote-buying, and violence, among other things (reftel). END NOTE)

¶2. (SBU) We obtained an account from the daughter of an embassy employee, who attends School #114. She related that on February 23 an argument among several students (including Beglarian's son, the principal's nephew, and a number of other oligarchs' teenage children) escalated into a large brawl. The next day Beglarian's son, apparently unsatisfied with the previous day's outcome, held a gun to the head of one the students, while his comrades (probably bodyguards included) severely beat up another kid, who turned out to be the principal's son.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: Too many children of Armenia's post-independence political and economic elite appear to be growing up in an atmosphere of impunity for their actions, and been left bereft of any sense of accountability for their actions or social responsibility. Clashes between these "untouchable" teens and twenty-somethings and passersby, and among rival cliques of these budding young sociopaths -- though still comparatively infrequent -- are becoming some of the most dangerous and unpredictable phenomena in Armenia's streets, nightspots, and now schoolyards.

YOVANOVITCH